

NMCD Handbook for Volunteers

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I. CONDUCT AT THE PRISON FACILITY

A. Know your Volunteer Coordinators

The Volunteer Coordinator (usually the Chaplain) serves as the liaison between your group and the prison administration. This staff person is the individual appointed by the prison administration to oversee all aspects of the community volunteer program. This would include approving individuals to be volunteers, scheduling volunteer activities, generating clearance memos, setting up and providing training.

The working relationship between your group's coordinator and the prison's Volunteer Coordinator is vital to the successful implementation of your service. Communication, to the extent possible, should always be between the group coordinator and the VC. This single point of contact model allows for clear communication and eliminates the problems associated with trying to coordinate the same activity through several different people. The VC already works with dozens of different group leaders, to have to also deal with many members of the same group leads to confusion, miscommunication and unnecessary tension. Let your group coordinator work with the VC and then your group coordinator can work and relay information to all members of the group.

B. Know your schedule

Do not try to gain access into the institution when you are not scheduled to be there. Institutions work off very rigid daily schedules. Most must use the same space to provide many different programs. Trying to squeeze in additional un-scheduled activities on short notice is very difficult and may be impossible.

C. Plan ahead

If your group must make changes to its schedule work with the VC as far ahead of time as possible. The VC will need to review existing schedules, generate new clearance memos and advise inmates. All require time.

D. Be on time

- Be there prior to the time you are scheduled to start your program.
- Remember it takes time to be checked into the facility and get to the program area. Facilities frequently must hold staff on overtime to oversee activities. If you're late there may not be a staff member available to run the program when you get there.
- Come as a group. The facility may not have the staff resources to keep admitting stragglers.
- Time is also important to the inmate, as he has been assigned to a specific activity within a specific time frame. If the volunteer is late or does not come at all the inmate loses out on an activity to which he was probably looking forward to with much anticipation. Building and maintaining a stable level of trust with correctional staff and inmates is crucial to the success of your program.

E. Entering the facility and security clearance checks

- Prisons are supposed to be difficult to get in and get out of. This is necessary to maintain a safe and secure environment for inmates, staff and the public.
- You must be on a preapproved clearance list.
- Your personal ID will be viewed and held by the facility.
- Your keys may be held by the facility.
- You may be asked to clear a metal detector so plan ahead. Having clothing with excessive metal parts, jewelry etc, will delay your entry into the facility.
- Anything you bring will be searched.
- You will be escorted to and from the program area.

F. What to bring

- Bring only the materials approved by the institution for the program.
- Bring your government issued picture ID (Drivers License).

G. What not to bring

- Do not bring large amounts of money.
- No cell phones or pagers.
- Medication, if you must bring a prescription or other medications, only bring the quantity you need to take while at the facility. Be sure to check with your VC and find out if you will be able to have the prescription on your person while on the prison grounds. It would be better to take the medication before or after your prison event, so plan ahead.
- It is a felony to introduce contraband into the facility.
- No knives, guns, belt tools (leatherman or similar)
- Tobacco
- Gum
- Literature not approved for your program
- If you're not sure, consult with your program leader.
- Don't bring in anything that has not been approved in advance.

H. How to dress

- Your appearance will determine how facility staff, inmates and peers ultimately receive you. Obey the facility dress code.
- Dress conservative, Tee shirts with appropriate sayings or pictures are usually acceptable. No open toe shoes.
- No shorts, dresses hemmed above the knees or with thigh high slits.
- No low cut or see through blouses
- No spandex
- No clothes full of holes
- No excessive or expensive jewelry. If you lose it while at the prison it will most likely never be recovered.

I. Don't come to the prison if you have been drinking alcohol

J. Obey facility staff

Facility staff will provide periodic monitoring of your program. Even the best run facilities have problems from time to time. A situation may occur that requires the facility to be locked down. If during your program a staff member comes and advises you to end your program, you must leave and follow the directions of the staff member. Immediately obey him/her. Don't argue. Do whatever the staff

instructs you to do. Your safety and the safety of others may depend on your quick compliance.

K. Accountability

- Be accountable for your behavior at all times.
- Fulfill the obligation of your program only.
- *Always be professional, **respectful**, and courteous to prison staff, inmates and other volunteers and their programs.*
- Don't be the catalyst for a problem that may lead to you and your volunteer team being denied access to the facility.

II. DEALING WITH PRISONERS

Many persons who are incarcerated have had more than their share of frustrations in their lives. Most have experienced repeated failure and are, at least on the outset, suspicious of any offer of assistance or guidance from others whom they do not know.

Working with prisoners cannot be reduced to a "cookbook" form. Much will be left to the good judgment of the volunteer. The following guidelines provide a frame of reference for the volunteer in relating to the prisoner. Your following the rules will help you gain the inmate's respect and at the same time provide a solid foundation for a positive relationship. Your failure to follow the rules puts you on the list of those in their past who could not be trusted and have added to their share of frustrations.

A. Be yourself

- There is no need to establish a façade or to create some kind of special status for yourself in relationship to the offender.
- Express your feelings genuinely.
- An honest and unmasked expression of feelings is one important way for the volunteer to show concern.

B. Set boundaries early in the relationship

- Set the parameters or boundaries of the relationship from the beginning.
- Identify what you will and will not do.
- What is appropriate, what is not appropriate and will not be tolerated.
- Make sure both you and the inmate are clear regarding these boundaries and stick to them. Inmates will test these boundaries on a regular basis. Don't be surprised when you are asked to do something that clearly violates these boundaries. When this happens, immediately re-affirm the boundaries with the inmate. If you do not, the inmate will know he/she can manipulate you.

C. Mean what you say

Never make a promise unless you've thought it through first and are prepared to carry it out. The inmate will test you, call your bluff, and see if you will deliver. This is an important part of an inmate's process of learning to trust you, which will come slowly in any case. Refrain from making promises in general. It may be useful and wise to talk to your Volunteer Coordinator before you mention the idea to the inmate or agree to do anything for him/her.

D. Respect

Respect is the key toward developing a positive and rewarding relationship with the inmate. He/she will not be open with you until he or she respects or trusts you. Conversely, you must respect the inmate's individuality and basic rights as a human being. There is no room for narrow prejudices or feelings of superiority. Respond to the inmates needs and interests, not your own. Your volunteer service is to provide encouragement to those in prison who appreciate the positive influence of outside friends and not vice versa.

E. Be supportive, encouraging, and friendly, but firm

It is part of your job to be honest and objective, disapproving when it is warranted, as well as praising, supporting and encouraging when that is warranted.

F. Win respect for yourself

The inmate will never respect you until it is clear that you cannot be conned or manipulated. The inmate's manipulations may be expressed in requests for you to: influence others, bring contraband in, take something out or pass a message. Never be shy about saying "NO" to a request you really do not want to grant or you know it is clearly against the rules. The request may be for something that is borderline, and may seem insignificant. Tell the offender you will check to see if it's all right, and then ask for guidance from the appropriate official.

Remember those boundaries. Stick with them.

G. Do not use personal physical contact

Volunteers should refrain from making physical contact with offenders other than a handshake at beginning and end of sessions. Though personal contact such as a hug may be a seemingly harmless gesture, offenders frequently misunderstand the meaning of the contact and may interpret the gesture as affection.

Handshakes only

No Hugging

No Kissing

No touching of any kind other than handshake

Avoid being alone with a prisoner of the opposite sex. Stay with your group.

H. Do not ask an inmate why he/she is incarcerated

Let the inmate tell you in his/her own time about the offense committed, the family left behind, or any other personal matters.

Be forewarned, some day the inmate may talk about his crimes and past. Do you really want to know? Will what he/she tells you change your opinion of him/her?

I. Accept the inmate

Accept the offender as an individual who is no better and no worse than anyone else. To pigeon hole or categorize a person is, in a way, to dehumanize a person.

J. Be patient

Don't expect overnight miracles. When things have been going wrong for years and years for a person, things cannot be corrected in a few weeks or months. The

positive effects of your relationship with the offender may not have a decisive effect until long after you've stopped working with the person.

K. Expect Hostility

There may be a time when an inmate, overwhelmed by troubles, will confront you with hostility. At such times, do not force conversation upon the person and above all do not respond in a hostile, sarcastic, or anxious manner. Do not act shocked. Retain your composure. Ignore the hostility or withdraw for a while and chances are that person will regain his/her composure.

L. Don't expect thanks

You may not receive thanks or any expression of gratitude from the offender. He or she may feel it, but may not know how to express gratitude. They may actually feel embarrassed by it. You may never hear "thank you", but in the long run your efforts will be appreciated, probably more than you or anyone else will ever know. Enjoy knowing this person. Don't be inhibited about laughing and having fun with the offender. They need this and it can be one of the real pleasures of your volunteer work.

M. Don't be misled by flattery

Sometimes the supposed gratitude, "you're the only person that will listen to me" is the first step towards getting you to do something that you should not do.

N. Don't make assumptions

Just because it may sound reasonable, doesn't mean it is. If you're not sure, "check it out" with your group coordinator or the staff person in charge of supervising your program.

O. Do not get involved in facility/ department internal affairs

Do not become an advocate for the inmate

- An inmate may want to tell you how the correctional staff is abusing them, or how they are being deprived of some item or privilege. Prisoners will frequently voice complaints, either real or imagined to anyone they think might be able to assist them get what they want. There are many internal avenues of relief for an inmate who believes he/she is being abused or mistreated. The inmate needs to use the internal avenues at the prison and bring the problem to light by going through the appropriate channels.
- The best course of action would be to listen to the inmate and then remind him/her of the purpose of your program. Reestablish boundaries and recommend that he/she consider using the inmate grievance system.
- As a volunteer you are there to provide a specific service. It will not be helpful if you become an advocate for the inmate and become involved in the day-to-day affairs of the institution. Check with your program leader and the Volunteer Coordinator if you are not sure about how to deal with the situation.

P. Confidentiality of information

- What you talk about with the inmate is between you and that person. You may be able to overlook what the inmate has done in his/her past, but others in your group may not. Keeping confidentiality boundaries can be a way of gaining the inmate's trust and respect.
- Confidentiality has its limits. If an inmate tells you something that leads you to believe the life and or safety of another is in jeopardy, you have an obligation to

report it to your Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible. In a prison setting, inmates may tell you about pending violence or dangerous activities hoping you will tell the administration. By going through volunteers, family or others they avoid potential problems of becoming a “snitch” in other inmates’ eyes because they themselves did not tell the administration.

III. THE CON AND CON GAMES

Information is power to the inmates. Inmates will try to learn personal things about you. Some may generally want to know you as a person, but others are seeking information and looking for an angle to exploit or manipulate you or your family, or even threaten you if you don’t do what they want.

Con games start out very subtle and innocent. They just want someone to write to when they are feeling down. The letters or cards will be innocent at first asking for nothing. Then one day they may ask you to buy them something simple like maybe some greeting cards so they can write you. If you give in to their requests, they have you. The requests will get bigger and will eventually become demands. When you try to back out they will threaten to inform on you and tell you how much trouble your going to be in.

The best thing you can do is not to give personal information to them. This applies to both working with the inmate in prison and after release.

A. Do not bring in anything to the facility that has not been approved.

Do not play middleman by passing along, notes, letters, conversations etc. for inmates

Don’t take anything out or bring in anything for offenders. There are rules, procedures and processes for everything. Inmates know them better than most staff. If they are asking you to circumvent the system, it probably means they are up to something and you had better beware.

B. The safety zone—More Do’s and Don’ts

Respect these safeguards and the likelihood of problems will be minimal.

- 1. Do not provide the inmate with your home address, or phone number.**
- 2. Do not advise an inmate of your place of work, address or phone number. (*Consider being unlisted in the phone book. Most correctional professionals are unlisted.*)**
- 3. Do not give names/addresses of family or friends.**
- 4. Do not discuss personal or family life/problems with the inmate.**

The inmate should know as little about you as possible. This personal information is not necessary to fulfill the mission of your program. You are not supposed to be “On call” to the inmate. If they don’t know where you live or work they can’t seek you out.

C. What to do if the inmate gets your personal information

Reaffirm your boundaries.

Don’t accept collect calls from within the prison. If you get them, note the date and time you received the call, then call the prison. NMCD can block the phone calls.

If the inmate does call, politely tell them you cannot talk to them.
Be firm in your conviction to follow the prison rules governing volunteer conduct.
Advise your program leader and the Volunteer Coordinator. You cannot be accused of any wrongdoing if everything you do is in the open.

D. Make a report on volunteer program rule violations

If a member of your volunteer team violates the volunteer program rules the two of you should report it to your team leader who will then work with the Volunteer Coordinator to take whatever remedial action is necessary. Volunteers who do not follow the rules discredit the program. They could also be placing themselves in a situation where they may actually be harming themselves and the inmates they thought they were trying to help.

Prison Volunteer Guidelines Inventory Sheet

Name of Volunteer: _____

Date: _____

Facility: _____

1. Your Volunteer Coordinator is: _____
2. He/she can be contacted at phone #: _____
3. Entering the facility.
 - a. Remember to bring a valid _____
 - b. Do not bring in _____ that has not been approved in advance.
4. Obeying facility staff:

If during the course of your program a staff member comes and advises you to end the program, you must _____ and follow the _____ of the staff member.
5. Dealing with inmates.

List three keys for building a positive relationship with an inmate.

 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

-Win respect for yourself. Never be shy about saying “_____” to a request you do not want to grant or you know is already against the rules.
-Do not become an _____ for the inmate.
-Keeping confidentiality boundaries can be a way of gaining the inmate’s trust and _____.
6. Don’t bring anything _____ or take anything _____ for inmates.
7. Do not provide inmates with your _____ or _____ number.
8. Be firm in your conviction to follow the prison _____ governing volunteer conduct.
9. My group coordinator’s name is: _____.

I understand that I am to coordinate my volunteer service through my group coordinator. My group coordinator is the contact person for our group with the prison Volunteer Coordinator.
10. I have read and understand the volunteer Handbook and pledge to follow its guidelines regarding my conduct as a volunteer with NMCD.

Name(print): _____ Signature: _____